

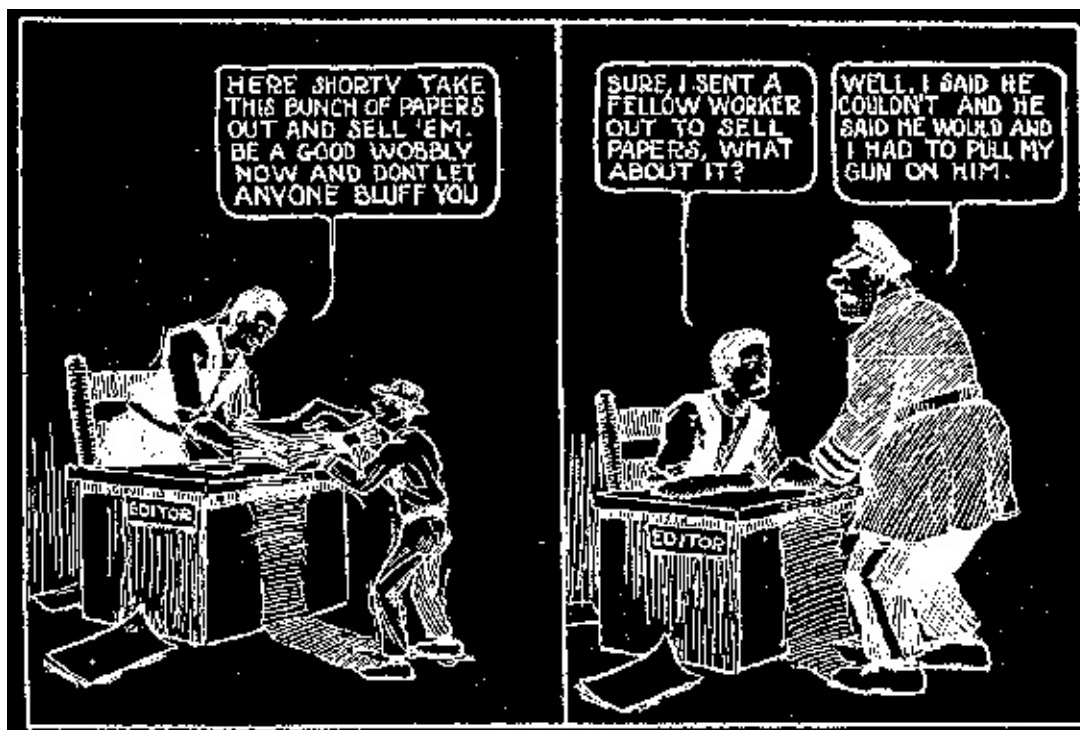


Writing for the Industrial Worker

The *Industrial Worker* is your newspaper.

Your newspaper not merely in the sense that as a member of the Industrial Workers of the World you own it and elect its editor — more importantly, it relies on you for coverage of significant labor news in your industry and your town. The articles in the *Industrial Worker* are written up by workers like you, telling about their experiences, their struggles, and the issues that confront them every day as workers.

If your job branch wages a direct action campaign against lousy conditions, you can be sure that other folks will want to know about it — perhaps to try the same thing where they work, or for inspiration, or to reassure their fellow workers that it can work. But if you don't send in the information, we won't know about it. People around the union want to know about what folks in other parts of the IWW are doing. Some activities can be covered with a few sentences for the Around Our Union column or as



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part of a broader write-up of what the IWW is doing around an issue, others call for a longer article or an interview with participants. (And if a story needs a fair amount of space to be told, there are probably possibilities for photographs as well.) There's no one in a better position to write the story than you — after all, you're there on the scene, you know what's going on, you know the people involved. If you can't do the writing yourself, maybe you can line up another fellow worker or send in some notes on what happened and some clippings from the local paper (and a phone number so we can get back to you with any questions). But writing for publication is easier than you might think. This little pamphlet is intended to help you get started.

Write for your reader

The most important thing to keep in mind when writing is your audience. Often you live the story you're telling on a daily basis. You know what it's like to work in a metal-roofed warehouse in the summer, who Smith or Jones is and why every worker hates him, what a jack screw is...

Some readers will too, but the *Industrial Worker* is read by workers in many different industries, and many different parts of the world. So it's important to explain specialized terms, to identify people clearly, to spell out just what conditions are like — to always ask yourself “will this make sense to someone who's never worked this job?”

If you're not sure, try showing the article to a friend, and ask her to underline everything that doesn't make sense or needs more explanation

— and maybe to make a note of sections where you go overboard in the other direction as well. In the end it's your story, and you need to decide for yourself what works and what doesn't. But it needs to work not just for you and your fellow workers — it needs to work for people halfway across the globe as well.

Getting your facts straight

There's nothing easier than to misremember someone's name or title, or to get the details of something that happened a few years ago wrong; and there's no quicker way to destroy your credibility. So it's important to write down names (and check the spelling), and to go and check things for yourself rather than relying on your memory or on a comment from a co-worker.

If you hear a quote you think you'll want to use, write it down right away.

If you're on the picket line and something interesting happens, take notes.

Collect leaflets, contracts, memos, articles from the boss press — anything that might help nail down details when it comes time to write your story. If you talk to someone, ask for their phone number so you can get back to them if necessary. A lot of the material you gather will turn out not to be useful, but there's nothing more frustrating than finding yourself in the middle of writing up a story, desperately trying to remember something

or have compatibility issues so the straight text in your message is also that should have been in your notes.

lutely essential. If your article uses special characters (accents, umlauts, You want to be careful to make sure you write what you mean to say as tildes, etc.), these are often swallowed up in the process of computer trans- well. A lot of people — including many professional reporters — throw words mission. A note with a straight text version of names or phrases needing more or less randomly on the page, figuring that it's close enough to get special characters and a description of where the characters belong will the gist of what they want to say across. Big newspapers have lost many help make sure we get it right.

libel suits because some copy editor tried to figure out what an incoherent

Things may have changed since this pamphlet was published, so check sentence meant and guessed wrong. Some years back an IWW organizer the most recent issue of the newspaper to make sure you have the current was sued based on a press release that allegedly (we never saw a copy) address. We publish the date the issue went to press in the bottom of the said the boss had been found guilty of unfair labor practice charges, when staff box on page 2 — it's generally a pretty good bet that the next issue what had actually happened was that the National Labor Relations Board will go to press four weeks after the current one did. But since it takes a had decided to prosecute them. The organizer then sent in an article for few days to put the paper together, you don't want your copy to reach the the *Industrial Worker* in which he vehemently denied that the press re-editor on the actual press date unless you're made special arrangements in lease said any such thing, attributing the problem to a local reporter who advance and there really is no alternative.

didn't understand NLRB procedures — but in the course of the article (which we fixed before publication) he went on to say that the Board had found the boss guilty of unfair labor practices. The boss was eventually found **Bundles**

guilty and the lawsuit dismissed, but careless writing remains the enemy Once you've written an article, you might want to get some extra copies of writers everywhere.

to distribute. After all, the greatest article in the world can't make much Don't worry about getting too much information, there's always time to difference if your fellow workers never see it. (If you're not already getting winnow it down later. Just make sure that you understand the information a bundle regularly, you might want to think about doing so — many book-completely, well enough to be able to explain it to someone else. On a more stores will be glad to take copies on consignment, the newspaper makes a complicated story it's often a good idea to draw up a list of the main points great item for literature tables, and can be a cost-effective introduction to you need to address in your story in advance. Then look the list over, and the union.) Bundles are available to IWW members and branches for just ask yourself if you have the information you need to make each point stick.

20 cents a copy to help with printing and postage costs. (If that's a prob-When you have the information you need, it's time to sit down and lem, and you have a promising opportunity to distribute the paper, let us write. Don't put this off to

the last minute – often in the process of writing know and we'll work something out.)

it will become obvious that you forgot to interview someone, or that some It's generally a good idea to get your bundle order in the same time as important fact is fuzzy in your mind, or that you just don't understand why your article. That gives us time to adjust the press run, if necessary, and to someone was so adamant over a particular point. So you need to allow a make sure we have the information in time to send your papers out with little time to get back to people, and to nail down those pesky facts.

the regular mailing. (Mailing the papers with the regular mailing is much, much cheaper, as we can go periodicals rate instead of Priority or Parcel Post.)

Good writing is like cutting a diamond

Many branches take 25 or 50 copies of the paper, and report that it's a Some people get all worked up over writing, trying to get everything great outreach tool; a few take 200 copies on a regular basis (and more for clear in their head before putting anything down on paper. That's a big special projects). Why not start with a bundle of 10 (that's \$2 a month), and mistake. The thing to do is to sit down and write. Let the words flow natu-see how it goes? To order a bundle of papers, it's best to write to the editor rally, like you're talking to someone, making your feelings and ideas as and to also call General Headquarters at 215-222-1905.

specific and vivid as possible.

The first draft won't be perfect. Some sentences just won't flow, some
Industrial Worker

ideas won't be clear, and maybe you'll need to reorganize things a bit.

Entire paragraphs may need to be cut out. Often you'll have taken on too **email:**
iw@parsons.iww.org

much, and you'll need to prune a couple of side issues off so that you can
Editor: Jon Bekken

bring the key issues to the fore. If the article needs a lot of work, you don't **11**

Bexley Road #2

have to show that draft to anyone. Every writer turns out some pretty **Roslindale MA 02131**

rough prose on their first take; good writers take the time to look over what

they've written and revise it so it says exactly what they want to say, as Try not to take pictures of people shaking hands or posing in front of a clearly and vividly as possible. The point is to get something down on room. Sometimes there's no alternative, but grip and grin photos are usu-paper, so that you can work with it, refining that rough material into the ally boring. If you think about what you want to say with a photo, you can story you want to tell.

set up the shot to say it. Capture pickets in front of the company's sign. If you're doing a story about the boss's captive meeting, a photo of someone **Establishing credibility**

snoozing might be the perfect illustration. If you're happy with the turn-out for your event, frame the shot to include as many people as possible. If Don't expect people to believe you just because you're sincere. Prove you're upset that there weren't more people, frame the shot to include each point you're trying to make with specific facts, your own experience, some empty chairs.

interviews with other workers, and such.

If you don't think before you shoot, all your photos will look the same.

Facts are tricky things, and you need to be very careful with them. While Too many photos show speakers hugging the podium, the same old offian editor can work on a sentence that doesn't quite flow or fix sloppy cials holding awards, people staring right into the camera, and committees punctuation, she can't know how that name really should have been spelled sitting behind long tables. Look for action. Photograph people on the job or what department the job action started in. Nothing discredits a news-or talking to someone. If you're shooting a speech, try to get a shot that paper quicker than for readers to notice that it's wrong on things they includes the audience with the speaker. If you're too far away from the know from personal experience. You are our first, and often only, line of action, it's hard to capture gestures and faces. Try not to rely on zoom defense to make sure we get things straight. Writing from memory is a lenses,

it's better to get up close, and to shoot photos from a variety of sure-fire way to make mistakes. If you know you're going to be writing a angles. If you're shooting a crowd, try to set up so you can catch them story, take a note pad with you. Write down people's names (and titles), when they're moving, not when they're standing around listening to how many people were there, what the issues were, what any interesting speeches. Try for a mix of close-ups and wide angle shots that show the signs or speakers say, the name of the company, etc. If there's any chance vastness of the crowd. Ideally, you'd have a shot where a few people at all you might want to refer to it later, write it down now. If you didn't get stand out in the foreground while the hugeness of the crowd fills in the a chance to write things down at the time, you'll probably need to go back background, though getting such a shot requires that you get a little bit of out and get the information later.

height so you can see behind the first row.

You also need to make sure the facts will be clear when the story reaches the editor and the reader. Even simple facts can become confused in trans-mission. If you write that something happened "yesterday" or "Tuesday"

Sending in copy

then we have to guess as to what you mean. Use the date instead. Once a It's generally best to write up a story as soon after it happens as pos-writer used a newspaper clipping to get someone's title – unfortunately, sible, and then to send it in right away. That way, things will be fresh in they had recently been promoted from organizing director to president.

your mind as you write, and the article will arrive at the editor's desk while it's still timely. But it's important to have a sense of the Industrial Worker's **Colorful writing**

deadlines so that you can make sure your article arrives on time and so that you can plan out when to write up continuing stories such as a strike or Many people learned to write in school, trying to impress teachers with organizing campaign. At the present time, the Industrial Worker is pro-complicated sentences, big words, and extra pages to show that you put in duced 10 times a year, generally on the second weekend of the month.

a lot of work. The longer and less engaging the paper, the higher the While some

space can be held for late-breaking stories if we know they're grade. To communicate with your fellow workers about what's important coming, it's generally best to have everything in a few days ahead of time to you takes a different kind of writing – something much closer to how so there's time to look it over, ask any questions we might have, and con-you talk with your friends. Your writing should be direct and enthusiastic, sult you on revisions. Email the editor if you know you're going to be get-specific and colorful.

ting something in at the last moment so we can plan.

Readers don't want to read an endless stream of vague generalities or a Articles can be sent as hard copy (i.e., typed or printed out on paper), on lot of empty rhetoric. Give them word pictures – describe events or condi-computer disk (please include a print-out, in case we have trouble with the tions with enough detail that they can imagine seeing, hearing, feeling, disk or the program), or by email. If you send your article in by email, smelling or touching as they read along. Talk about real people's lives.

please paste the text into the body of your email message. You can attach Adjectives won't generally do the trick, instead give specific details, little a formatted file as well, if you'd like, but these often don't download cleanly facts that capture the essence of what you're writing about and help the

In covering a demonstration, your lead should probably focus on how reader 'see' what happened.

many people were there and what they demanded, unless there's some-Often you'll be surrounded by people speaking in jargon – union bu-thing more compelling (demonstrators stormed the building, throwing the reaucrats are just as capable of sounding pompous as the boss is. Vague boss on the street; police killed two people when they opened fire on the bureaucratic language is often used to make concrete events (like a worker's crowd; the heads of the city's largest unions called a general strike). You death or mass firings) vague, and to strip them of their human consequences.

should look at banners and signs to get an idea of who is there, and talk Just because the people you're talking to or the documents you're using as with people about why they came. Take notes of the chants. If speakers sources are filled with jargon and double-speak doesn't mean you have to say something

truly interesting take note of that as well, but we certainly do the same. While you will sometimes want to quote the jargon to show don't need transcripts of every boring speech by every piecard and readers how heartless or stupid the bosses can be, generally you want to politrickster in the land.

translate jargon into plain English so everyone knows just what's being In writing up the event, don't be afraid to be critical. Quite often we go said.

to demonstrations because we support the workers who are struggling, but have major criticisms of their officials or tactics. If the speakers platform is **Writing in active voice**

filled with labor fakers pledging their support to striking workers even as Voice refers to the form of the verb. The subject *acts* when you use the their unions engage in union scabbing, it's important to criticize that. In the active voice verb form. When you use passive voice, the person performing recent Detroit Newspaper Strike, unions organized rallies and other sym-the action becomes the object of the sentence. It does not act; it is *acted* bolic events, but refused to take direct action to shut down the scab pa-upon.

pers. And many sweatshop actions implicitly call for solidarity with the domestic bosses (many of them running sweatshops themselves), rather The Borders warehouse was closed for a week when 80 workers struck.

than with the exploited workers. It's not very helpful to our fellow workers to turn a blind eye to such mistakes. We should support workers' struggles, Eighty workers at the Borders warehouse struck April 30, rebelling against while pointing out possibilities for more effective action.

both their employer and Teamsters Local 89.

Photos help tell the story

The first sentence is about the company, pushing the workers into the If you can send a photo, do. While black and white photos work best, background. The second sentence is about the workers. It is in active voice.

but not every film developer can handle developing the film. Color photos Most fuzzy writing uses passive sentences instead of active ones. Passive work pretty well, as long as they have good contrast. Lots of Wobs like to sentences remove

the actor from the action. “Supervisor Jones turned on make red & black banners, which look fine in the color photo. But when the machine while it was being worked on” is an active sentence. “X did Y”

you convert to black and white, red comes out black, rendering the whole is an active sentence. But “This happened,” “That was done,” “There was thing unreadable. Faces against colored backgrounds (or shadows) can do this” are all passive sentences that make the action vague and dull. And the same thing. Yellow letters on black backgrounds stand out very nicely, when you write up the story (the way the official report probably does) to though. (If you’re in doubt about how the colors will translate, put it on a say “The machine was turned on while it was being worked on,” you’ve let photocopy machine; but by then it’s usually too late to get the printable the supervisor off the hook.

photos you need.) Film is cheap enough that you can afford to shoot a roll Use adjectives with care. A lot of writers use words like obviously, clearly or two on a single action. If possible try to get a variety of photos, some and of course. But if it’s really clear, it should be clear in your article. If it’s vertical, some horizontal, with different backgrounds and signs. That in-not obvious for all to see, then you need to go back and put more facts in creases the possibility of a photo working. (Make sure to include the date your article, so that readers will get the point. Banging them over the head the photo was taken, and the names of the people depicted if possible. But with adjectives won’t make them see things your way, quite the opposite.

don’t write on the photos with markers – they often bleed through the print, if it’s not a fast-drying ink the ink can also transfer to the photo **Speaking in tongues**

behind it.) We need actual prints. While lots of people swear by digital Be careful with abbreviations. If you’re all the time talking about a Para-photos, but at the Industrial Worker we’ve learned to swear at them in-graph 76 violation with your fellow shop stewards, all of whom know the stead. It’s virtually impossible with the printing technology we use to get contract by heart, that’s fine. But in your article you’ll need to spell it out for decent reproduction from a digital or digitized photo.

the vast majority of your fellow workers who’ve never even seen the con-

tract. (And once you've spelled it out, there's probably no reason to men-can't resist writing a "conclusion" then write it, but ask yourself whether tion Paragraph 76 at all — of course, if you were writing the same story up the story might be better lopping it off once you're done.

for a shop newsletter you'd want to discuss Paragraph 76 in some detail, so Many, many articles read like they were spit out from an automated your coworkers would learn more about their specific rights on the job and boredom inducer. "On Tuesday, July 20, a dozen Wobblies met to discuss how to exercise them.) While most readers know what OSHA or UAW stand local organizing possibilities." Change the date, and that lead could run for, some don't, so you'll want to spell it out the first time.

atop dozens of stories. That may be efficient, but it's not very interesting.

After you've finished writing, look your story over to see if you can find Other times writers try to imitate "objective" newspaper style, turning to long, complicated sentences which you could rewrite into two or three passive voice and generalities to conceal the fact that they're writing about simpler sentences that would be easier to read and would give readers a their own situations. This is always a mistake. It's much more effective to chance to catch their breath between ideas. But don't make every sen-write a personal story that lets readers see events through your eyes.

tence the same length and structure. Don't use the same word over and Other writers tell the story as if they were writing minutes. First we get over again either. Mix things up to keep them interesting.

a list of who was present, where they met, and the time the event started.

Then they go through speaker by speaker, with a summary of what each **The Lead**

had to say. And at the end of the story, we learn that members voted to strike. That's fine for the branch minutes book, but it just won't do for our In newspapering, the first sentence of an article is called the "Lead."

newspaper. Instead, you want to open with the most important part of your Start your article with something that grabs readers, that shows them what story (in this instance the decision to strike). Then you want to explain the story is about.

(We don't want a theme sentence that introduces the why. Then some background is fine for those who haven't been following story in general terms, rather we're looking for a snappy sentence with the story, and maybe a few quotes from the speakers. But there's no need specific information that engages the reader's interest and shows, not tells, to quote everyone who spoke, or to list the people who set up the chairs them where the story is going.) Don't clog your lead with the names and and chaired the meeting.

dates of everything and everyone. Put yourself in the shoes of your readers You also want to avoid glory hogging. Certainly you should mention the and ask 'Why should anyone care about this article?' Many experienced fact that Wobblies were on the line, or organized a soup kitchen. But if two writers write the story first, and then come back to the opening. Look for a Wobblies join a demonstration of thousands of people, a lead about how startling fact or quote that captures the essence of the story, or a familiar Wobblies mobilized to support striking workers isn't fair to those who did experience that will resonate with your readers. Some leads ask a ques-the actual work, and will ultimately tend to discredit us. Similarly, the IWW

tion, others introduce a theme that will organize the writer's ideas throughout didn't invent direct action, so there's no reason to claim "Wobbly tactics"

the article. But a good lead is specific; you don't want one of those theme anytime workers slow down on the job. Wobblies are by and large pretty sentences your high school English teacher was so fond of – you want to active, so there's plenty of legitimate opportunities to plug ourselves with-bring readers right into the story.

out stealing credit for events we were at best peripheral to.

If you're writing about conditions on the job, it's usually best to tell the Here's an example of a lead that doesn't work: story up close and personal (it could be you talking about your job, or you could tell the story by interviewing a fellow worker and telling the story At London City Hospital, employees have expressed growing concern through her eyes). If you're writing up a picket line or a demonstration, about security. Two nurses were robbed on the way to their cars during the often a more detached third-person voice will do the trick. But even if you month of August; one of those women had to be hospitalized.

focus on the personal in such a story, make sure you tell us the basics —

why you were there, when, how many people went, what happened, what In this example, you'll get a snappy lead if you cross out the first sen-was accomplished. We once got an article about a major protest that started tence. Once you've gotten readers into the story, you'll have plenty of op-with events that had happened years before, not getting to the ostensible portunities to throw names and dates and such at them.

subject at hand until half-way through the piece. That just won't do. An-Don't let your article dwindle off at the end either. Leave people with a other article had vivid descriptions of encounters with the police, but never new idea, a quote that sums up the situation, or possible solutions. Try not got around to discussing why Wobblies were there in the first place. That to go out with a bunch of sloganeering about how your story proves the might be fine for the boss press, which loves action and violence and hates need for One Big Union. The same can be said for a lot of the stories we context and explanation, but we're trying to educate our fellow workers publish, and folks will get bored if we say so over and over again. If you about the issues and to build a movement.